

SBT-AE-006. Leisure. W H Davies Poem.

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Leisure. W H Davies Poem. Appreciation By P S Remesh Chandran

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By [PSRemeshChandra](#), 16th Mar 2011. Short URL

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Man is always eager to observe and enjoy the beauties of nature. Only that he does not get enough time for rest to elate and thrill his mind by soaking up the magnificent spectacles Mother Nature has created around him. It was in the midst of and from these beauties that man was created. Therefore, his wish to always be with them is only natural. Whenever he has to leave the beauties of nature behind, he pines in his heart as if leaving his homeland.

Go to a jungle river, bath and wash your clothes, spread them on rocks to dry and lie under some shady stream-side trees.

01. William Henry Davies Portrait 1915.

Staying with nature and enjoying the innocent beauties nature created around man is soothing to the soul and invigorating to the physic. Going to a riverside jungle, lying under a tree growing out of large boulders shading us from sunlight, listening to the voices of birds chirping nearby and the gentle murmur of a stream flowing away, is an experience not all can have everyday. Frequenting Jungle Rivers, bathing in river, washing our clothes and spreading them on rocks to dry and resting under a spreading tree while they are drying, is a pleasure we will wish to have everyday. Once we have visited such a scenic beauty spot and



have rested there feeling the wind blowing across us and water flowing below us and listened to waves gently lapping over the shore, we will consider ourselves lucky and would dream of going to such places again and again and refreshing us again.

Primitive man who sat in his mountain cave watching the beauty of a sunset was the first poet.



02. Reading in leisure: The greatest of all pastimes.

Archaeological excavations of ancient sites of human living have taught us that there has been no time in human history that was totally deprived of leisure and time for rest. Whenever man got freed of inevitable and immediate works, he always found a little time to indulge in leisurely activities like painting, singing, writing and debating. Primitive man who, after a delicious meal, sat in leisure in the mouth of his mountain cave and watched the beauty of a distant sunset was the first person who chiseled poems on rocks. From the snow-buried Neanderthal Valley in Germany and the ice-frozen caves of Cro-Magnon in France, we have dug up evidence of the outcomes of a hunting society's pass-time and leisure in the form of magnificent rock wall paintings, and stood in awe.

The idea of calm and leisure exists in a sitting cat.



03. Statue of Davies on the seafront of Port Williams.

Man is not alone in enjoying the beauties of nature and leisure. Cats, horses, cows, squirrels, birds- they all catharsizes their souls through leisure. Cats are the first to enjoy music, sunshine, rest and leisure. In beautiful evenings they can be seen washing and meticulously cleaning themselves taking hours, then walking to their regular elevated acoustically-optimized spots and sitting there listening to their favourite church or temple music coming through loudspeakers, while basking themselves in bright warm sunlight. Cows and sheep constantly and steadily gaze at things situated far away for any length of time, but if we go and stand behind them and look for what they had been gazing at for long that much interestedly, we will see nothing particular or special. They are enjoying their leisure.

Work stretches to fill the time available to finish it.



04. Cats are the first to enjoy leisure and sunshine.

One curious thing about work is it stretches itself to fill the time available to finish it. The more time available to finish it is there, the work takes more time to finish. So practically man gets no time for leisure. In earlier societies in which everyone had to work without rest to make their living, there was no leisure, no civilization and no culture to be mentioned, and they remained Barbarians. 'A society enters upon the process of civilization only when it is able to afford a minority who does no work but just sit, eat and think.' Discovery of agriculture, mechanization and tools guaranteed enough food crops to be produced for all without everyone having to work for achieving this level of self-sufficiency and generated leisure time, and civilization began. Leisure is something that is disappearing from this world. Leisure is what brought civilization and culture into this world, will keep the light of civilization burning, and keep the world from falling apart in future. Without its soothing balm, civilizations, societies and nations are lost. Without its cementing bondage, empires of intricate economics and politics would crumble and fall. And without its promising prospect, man's achievements on land, air, sea and space would go to smithereens.

Admiring eyes of a tramp and rural shepherd in America.



05. There is enough to see but man has not time.

William Henry Davies was a British poet who lived during 1871-1940. In the earlier years of his life he led the life of a tramp and rural shepherd in America, the stamps of which can be seen in his poems. In his famous poem *Leisure*, he regrets the loss of leisure from human life. He was very keen in his observations of nature and in this he stands in line with Robert Frost and Alexander Pope.

Flight of Leisure through Middle Ages, Renaissance, Industrial Revolution and Twenty First Century.

Duration of leisure available in society is a measure of its achievements in arts, music, science, literature, civilization and culture. Since the invention of agriculture and the wheel, human society had been advancing steadily in this respect till the middle ages. Since then, slavery and bondage for the poor and corpulent fleshly ills for the rich became a custom, civilization nearly

dried up and the world fell into a long period of dark ages. Only in a few corners of the world did the light of knowledge burn dimly but without diminishing. Human intelligence- chained up and bound- strove fiercely to free itself from the bondage of evil religion and the darkness of dogma, and a few rays of bright light began to appear here and there in the world. Mechanization and a series of scientific discoveries brought leisure again to man's society since the Sixteenth Century and the 're-awakening of thought began, knowledge became fashionable and science commenced to stir', the total effect of which we called Renaissance which lasted four centuries and marked a peak in human achievements. Industrial revolution of the Nineteenth Century brought lethargy and stupor for the Twentieth and Twenty First Centuries and leisure is now giving way to round-the-clock engagement, greed for riches and prosperity, and discontentment- the enveloping of another kind of dark ages. The result: civilization is drying up again, repeating the cycle.

Squirrels forget their hidden caches and man recovers them for dinner.



06. Basking in Sun in leisure after eating apple.

Man is now left with no time to observe and enjoy the beauties of nature. He has now no time left to stand beneath the flowery branches of trees and stare as long as the sheep or cows do at the things he likes. The cattleman

profession of the poet is reflected here. Passing through the woods, he sees squirrels running everywhere and hiding their nuts in the grass. Sometimes they may forget these caches and man will find them and recover them for his dinner, the thought of which makes the poet laugh heartily, for he himself had often sought these forgotten stores in his hunger. But now he has no time left to enjoy the briskness and beauty of their movements.

Squirrels have a fixed time and route to enter a grove and drink honey before going to the next.

Have anyone observed a squirrel harvesting honey from a plantain grove? It has a fixed time and route to enter a plantation, say 3 PM in the evening for a particular plantation. It enters at one corner by jumping from a coconut leaf from the neighboring plantation into this grove, travels harvesting through all plantains along a time-and-distance-economized route and moves out at the opposite corner by jumping into a coconut tree on the edge of the grove, passing on to the next grove to harvest. After savoring honey from one plantain tree, it will jump to another through plantain leaves till all plantains in that grove are covered, without ever coming down to the ground which is risky. To make a living, it has to cover many groves each day and that is why it economizes the time and distance of travel. So, the squirrels have their fixed time and route to enter a grove and cover it before going to the next. The author of this article has had to closely watch this time-table and schedule to enter his grove to drink honey from plantains before the squirrel arrives.

Watching star studded skies at night was a great pastime for the primitive man.



07. Guardian of the gateway in leisurely vigil: A heron.

Water bodies with glassy surfaces reflecting nature is a fine spectacle in woods. While walking through woods, the sudden appearance of the view of a lake or brook through the woods is delightful. Clean brooks and streams reflecting the rippling broad daylight would appear like bluish star-studded skies at night with their abundance of stars, a majestic sight to see through woods. But alas! The rush of life urges the modern man to move forward without stopping, to attend to the daily chores of life, leaving behind those beautiful sights un-enjoyed.

Innocent radiance of a smile would embrace anyone with its charm and warmth.



08. Leisure beneath the mountain canopies 1523.

Hills and valleys and meadows remain the same but their expressions change with time, like expressions in a human face change according to mood. We call the face along with its expressions countenance. It is nature's countenance that is changing with time. Morning, noon and night add specific expressions to nature's face. It's like nature going through various emotions and smiling. We know a smile begins in the eyes and finishes in the lips which would take a little time to complete. But we cannot sit there watching through morning, noon and night to see nature's smile finish. If someone has that much time, he is lucky indeed. Like a child's, nature's smile has an innocent radiance which enchants anyone with its charm and it has warmth which embraces anyone sitting for long with her. That is why man wishes to remain with nature as longer as he can.

Today the river is crystalline, tomorrow she is choky and narrow and then she is muddy and overflowing, like a fine dancer changing costumes.



09. Absolute leisure in the lap of eternity.

Nature also dances. And she is a lavishly gifted dancer. Her attires and adornments constantly changes with the passing of seasons. Today the leaves are tender green, tomorrow they are red and then they are dead brown. Today the earth is hot, tomorrow it is wet and then it is cold and bare with snow. Today the river is crystalline, tomorrow she is choky and narrow and then she is muddy and overflowing. It is like a fine dancer on stage changing costumes and continuing dancing. For whom does she dance? It is the mother dancing to delight and make happy the child. She is dancing for birds, butterflies, animals, fishes, snakes and man. It is ultimate beauty that is dancing there and it is soothing and solacing to see this supreme dancing of Mother Nature on hills, valleys and meadows. Birds, butterflies and animals watch it but man alone does not have time to watch his mother dance.

Dance of nature in hills and forests completes with the cycle of seasons.

*10. Last home of
Davies in
Gloucestershire,
England-
Glendower.*

Some critics have
shrunk the
meaning here to
the presence of
some mortal
human beauty
dancing and
smiling in the wild
and un-diligent
readers also may



fall into the same fallacy. But the logical reference here is to the presence of the perfect beauty, i.e., Mother Nature, dancing in the hills and the wild. The smile of nature is completed only with completion of the cycle of seasons, which means, to see the full smile of nature, one has to wait there at the same spot throughout one full year. Or we will see only an unfinished part of a smile without seeing its beginning and end. Man cannot wait that long and he has not that much time to spare. So, if this life is such full of care and anxiety that we are left with no time to stand and stare at things we like as long as we wish to, then it indeed is a very poor life in this earth.

Bloom Books Channel has a video of this poem.

Bloom Books Channel has a video of this poem Leisure titled ‘What Is This Life If Full Of Care’. A primitive prototype rendering of this song was made in a crude tape recorder decades earlier, in 1984. In 2014, a home made video of this song was released. In 2015, a third version with comparatively better audio was released. The next version, it's hoped, would be fully orchestrated. It's free for reuse, and anyone interested in can develop and build on it, till it becomes a fine musical video production, to help our little learners and their teachers.



11. Leisure Video Title.

You Tube Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2MuZDwnc_a0

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03. Statue of Davies on the seafront of Port Williams. Sculpture By Andrew Brown, Photo By A M Hurrell.
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Meet the author: About the author and accessing his other literary works.



Editor of Sahyadri Books & Bloom Books, Trivandrum. Author of several books in English and in Malayalam. And also author of 'Swan, The Intelligent Picture Book'. Edits and owns Bloom Books Channel. Born and brought up in Nanniyode, a little village in the Sahya Mountain Valley in Kerala. Father British Council-trained English Teacher and mother university-educated. Matriculation with High First Class, Pre Degree studies in Science with National Merit Scholarship, discontinued Diploma Studies in Electronics and entered politics. Unmarried and single.

12. Author Profile of P S Remesh Chandran By Sahyadri Archives.

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[Rathnashikamani](#)

31st Mar 2011 (#)

I didn't know much of W. H. Davies, but this one is about his most famous poem Leisure that I contemplate on when I see people distressed about their business being oblivious to the beautiful nature.



[PSRemeshChandra](#)

17th Apr 2014 (#)

Man in the midst of his everyday problems, worries and rush of life may forget to look around, see the things nature has created for us and read their messages. Life is very important and so is beauty but without life, what is beauty to us? Man is capable of seeing things in nature and understanding them but the more his duties are time-bound, the lesser time he gets for devoting to nature. Let us pardon them, us. The poet Davies also understood this very well like Robert Frost and that is exactly the message he wishes to convey. But poetry is indeed a consolation for souls in distress. You understand well dear Rathnashikamani.

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